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Meet Paul and Timothy

Please read 1 Timothy 1:1–2

The first and second letters to Timothy and that written to Titus are the last of Paul's epistles. The recipients, Timothy and Titus, were two of the great apostle's young 'lieutenants'; they were Paul's representatives at the churches of Ephesus and Crete respectively. Some would say they were the bishops of these churches. Paul wrote these letters to encourage Timothy and Titus in their onerous tasks of pastoring the people of God who were under their care.

These documents are often referred to as the 'Pastoral Epistles' because they contain much help and instruction on the administration and pastoral care of local churches. However, as with every book in the Bible, the teaching contained here is also relevant and applicable to all churches (and individual believers) in every age. One of the indications we have that these were not private documents, which were meant only for the eyes of Timothy and Titus, is found in the benediction at the end

of each of the three letters. Both letters to Timothy end with the words, 'Grace be with you', and the one to Titus concludes, 'Grace be with you all.' In all three cases the word 'you' is in the plural, so obviously the instructions and encouragements are destined for 'you all'—that is, the whole congregation of God's people, then and in every age.

The author

This is clearly stated to be the apostle Paul. The New Testament tells us a great deal about this particular apostle, whose special responsibilities were to the Gentiles. Three times his conversion to Christ is described in Acts (chapters 9, 22 and 26). In addition to this, from Acts 13 onwards we see Paul emerging as the dominant character in the story of the early church. We can also learn much about who he was and the way he conducted himself by reading the thirteen New Testament letters that bear his name.

From all of this information we see that Paul was one who gave himself entirely to God. He devoted his life to spreading the gospel message everywhere he went. He set up churches in numerous places and he served his Lord, and the people of God, unstintingly, despite many periods of illness, persecution and imprisonment.

Paul describes himself as 'an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope' (1:1). By saying that he was '*an apostle*' he means that he was someone who was sent out with a specific task. In the ancient world the word which is translated 'apostle' meant an 'envoy' or 'ambassador'. An ambassador is one who represents his country and its rulers. He is the connecting link between his own country and the land to which he has been sent as an ambassador.

In a very real sense every Christian man, woman and child is an ambassador of the Lord. Therefore, it is our task to represent our King (the Lord Jesus Christ) to our workmates, relatives, friends and acquaintances. We should be the means whereby Christ is made known to other people. It is an easy thing for me to write about our need to witness to the Lord, and for you to read about it, but I suspect that most of us are not performing this role very diligently.

Paul also said that he was ‘an apostle of *Christ Jesus*’. John, Peter and James usually described the Lord as ‘Jesus Christ’ but, particularly in these Pastoral Epistles, Paul almost always reverses the order to ‘Christ Jesus’—a phrase which he uses three times in these two opening verses. Why did he write ‘Christ Jesus’ instead of ‘Jesus Christ’? It may have been because he, a devout Jew, first perceived the Lord (on the Damascus road) as the Messiah—the fulfilment of all the hopes of Israel. It was only secondly that he saw him as the one who was sent to take away sin. Things were different for John, Peter and James. They had all been among the circle of those most closely associated with the Lord during his earthly life and ministry, and it was firstly by his human name, Jesus, that they knew him. Only later had they come to recognize him as the promised coming one (the Messiah—Christ).

Paul then added that he was ‘an apostle of Christ Jesus *by the command of God*’. He is saying that he did not represent himself. His own ideas and views on various matters did not count for anything. He was an apostle of Christ Jesus. It was the Lord Jesus Christ who controlled everything that he did, said and thought. Each instruction which he received came from his King—the one who commanded his loyalty (the word ‘command’ occurs over and over again in this epistle). But Paul did not just obey Christ because it was his duty to do so. He obeyed because he

loved Christ and it was the aim of his life to please him. William Barclay wrote, 'It is always a privilege to do even the humblest and most menial thing for someone whom we love and respect and admire, for someone whom we hero-worship.'¹

Like Paul, we too should always remember that we are constantly on the King's business. People are watching us all the time, so we must never let down the good name of Christ by becoming involved in anything which is dishonouring to our Lord. We should regularly ask ourselves, 'Can I take Christ with me to the particular place, or event, which I propose to attend?'

Paul continues by saying that he was 'an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God *our Saviour*'. We do not find God described as 'our Saviour' in any of Paul's earlier letters but, as a Jew, he would have been brought up to recognize God as the Saviour—the one from whom all blessings flow. In Psalm 24:5 the psalmist spoke of the godly man who 'will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God his Saviour'. The Virgin Mary sang, 'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour' (Luke 1:46–47). And to the Ephesians Paul wrote that their salvation is not because of their own good works; it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Another reason why Paul called God 'our Saviour' can be found in the background of the people who lived in Ephesus, to whom he was writing. The title 'Saviour' was often on the lips of men in those days. The Greeks called Asklepios, the god of healing, 'the Saviour'. The Romans had called Scipio, their great general, 'our hero and our salvation', and the current Roman Emperor, Nero, had taken upon himself the title, 'Governor and Saviour of the World'.²

A fifth thing that Paul tells us is that he is 'an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Saviour *and of Christ Jesus*

our hope. The people of those days, like many today, must have often felt their situation to be hopeless, but Paul reminded those believers that Christ Jesus is our hope. This word ‘hope’ is not something which is a vague wish which may, or may not, come to pass. In the New Testament the believer’s hope is something which is sure and steadfast. Just as a great sailing ship is prevented from being driven onto the jagged rocks because it is firmly held in place by a strong anchor, so hope in Christ is something which keeps us from falling into danger. The writer to the Hebrews tells us, ‘Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure’ (Hebrews 6:17–19).

The recipient of the letter

The letter is addressed to Timothy. We first come across this great worker for God in Acts 16:1. This was on Paul’s second missionary journey. Timothy was at Lystra in Asia Minor (modern Turkey). He had a Jewish mother, Eunice (see 2 Timothy 1:5) who was a believer, and a Greek father (who apparently was not a Christian). He also had the privilege of having a godly grandmother called Lois (2 Timothy 1:5). Obviously he was brought up in the Jewish tradition because Paul tells us that ‘from infancy’ he had ‘known the holy Scriptures’ (2 Timothy 3:15). This is a wonderful blessing for anyone, so what a great pity it is that few children today are brought up to know and believe the Bible’s teaching! From this New Testament information it seems likely that Timothy had been converted during Paul’s first missionary journey.

Apparently Paul must have been very struck by the sincerity

and enthusiasm of young Timothy, because he wanted to take him along with him (Acts 16:3). However, before doing so, he circumcised him. This was not because Paul thought that this rite was necessary for his salvation (see Galatians 2), but because he wanted to make sure that there was nothing about Timothy that would prevent him from being accepted by the Jews (Acts 16:3).

This was a very sensible action for Paul to take. There may well be customs which we do not feel are absolutely necessary for our Christian lives, but we should not hesitate to submit to them if our doing so will further the spread of the gospel (unless, of course, these customs are contrary to the spirit and teaching of the Scriptures). When we wish to help people, or win them over to our cause, it is necessary to bear in mind their cultural standards. I once heard of an English Christian lady who was visiting an evangelical church in Greece. She believed that she had freedom in Christ to go to church wearing trousers, but it was pointed out to her that she would give offence to the Greek believers if she did so. None the less she still insisted on attending the service in trousers because, as she said, 'I am sure there is nothing wrong with such behaviour, so the Greeks will just have to accept me as I am.' It would have done her no harm to have conformed and worn a dress or skirt, but her persistence caused some embarrassment to the local believers.

From the time of Paul's second journey, Timothy became a companion of Paul and a great helper in furthering the gospel. Later, when Paul was in prison in Rome for the second time, the apostle was to send for him saying, 'Do your best to come to me quickly' (2 Timothy 4:9).

Paul describes Timothy as 'my true son in the faith' (1:2). He obviously means that Timothy was his spiritual son. As we have already seen, Timothy's natural father was a Greek who probably

lived at Lystra, while Paul was a Jew and came from Tarsus. However, Paul may have been the one whom God used to bring about Timothy's second birth (his conversion to Christ).

The apostle said that Timothy was a genuine son—he was not illegitimate; he was true born. Timothy was not someone who had decided to 'give Christianity a try'. He was a genuine child of God. He was someone whose spiritual birth was so real that he would not flinch from his loyalty to Christ. He was firm in the faith. He was no Demas who, when the going got tough, would forsake the apostle (2 Timothy 4:10).³ The word for 'son' which Paul used was not the usual one (which appears some 380 times in the New Testament), but a more affectionate word which suggests 'tenderness and endearment'.⁴

Finally, the apostle wishes Timothy 'Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord' (1:2). Paul usually starts his letters with 'Grace and peace' (e.g. Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2 etc.), but in both of the letters to Timothy he adds 'mercy' to his usual list (see 2 Timothy 1:2).

'Grace' is a Christian variation on the normal Greek greeting. It means 'the free, unmerited favour of God'. None of us did anything to make God decide to save us. It was of his own good will and pleasure that he made us his children. This is what grace means.

'Peace' is the Hebrew word '*Shalom*'—the regular greeting given to anyone who might be met in the street. However, Paul endowed it with a spiritual meaning by making it stand for the whole well-being of a person 'in the widest sense of the word'.⁵

'Mercy' is that which is extended to those who have committed great wrong, but have been shown wondrous compassion and forgiven for all of their misdeeds.

Bernard sums up these three blessings like this: 'Even grace will not give peace to man, unless mercy accompany it; for man needs pardon for the past no less than strength for the future.'⁶

The meaning for us today

We must remember that we are all called, in some way or other, to represent the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul tells us that 'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come' (2 Corinthians 5:17). He goes on to say that we are Christ's ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20). Therefore, we need to ask ourselves, 'How faithfully have I have carried out my divine task?'

We must remember that Christ is our hope. Is he the object of our being? Do we keep him in view wherever we go, whatever we do and whatever we say? If we are his true sons and daughters in the faith, then we will want to live like God's children and tell others about the grace, mercy and peace which can only be found by trusting in Christ alone for salvation.